

Abstract 436

TITLE: Moving from Theory to Practice: A Theory-Based Neighborhood Mobilization HIV Prevention Initiative

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ISSUE: Community interventions are rarely described in public health journals. Using the AIDS Risk Reduction Model, diffusion theory, and social support theory, AIDS Action has developed a community organizing and community-building program that aims to build capacity in existing neighborhood networks to independently offer and sustain effective prevention programming. This approach allows us to place HIV within the range of competing and related needs and concerns of high-risk areas of the city.

SETTING: High incidence and prevalence neighborhoods in Boston, MA.

PROJECT: This project is an attempt to do more cost-effective prevention programming with scarce resources. A large body of prevention literature suggests that this method will be more likely to result in long-term maintenance of HIV-protective behavior among a statistically significant number of at-risk individuals. The Neighborhood Mobilization Project's components include (but are not limited to):

- Partnerships with local and state health departments to identify and choose high priority neighborhoods and populations therein, using epidemiology, resource allocation patterns, and identified gaps in services;
- Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) for quickly gathering social, cultural, and behavioral information relevant to HIV prevention, and for mapping community resources for this project; mobilization of community members to create, distribute and verbally reinforce messages among their peers;
- Increased availability of condoms, bleach kits, and referrals to needle-exchange sites; and
- Measuring community-wide progress toward readiness for behavior change.

RESULTS: In our formative research results, we will make the first installation of reports on the implementation of intensive, community-level interventions in high-risk areas. We will address the 1) theoretical foundations of the project; 2) formative process which includes prevention staff, community members, and prevention specialists; and 3) evaluation systems used to measure various outcomes.

LESSONS LEARNED: AIDS Action's experience thus far provides a model for dealing with the challenges to community-based prevention initiatives. We will address the issues of convincing the ASO infrastructure of the value of community-level initiatives; how to form partnerships within targeted communities; and challenges posed by existing categorical approaches to program funding.

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